

explaining roads, a town, a distant lake¹

Virginia Overell

1.
John Tranter, "Lufthansa," in *Under Berlin*. (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1988),
35.

*and the water, of course, is only soft when you're inside it. Look down. Now it moves in the sun, full of hard coins of light that shimmer red as they stretch away into a mist that is your own sweet salt. The coin cracks into new moons, long shards of light from the hearts of sad stars.*²

My studio project is concerned with the multitude of fluctuations, which form experiences of being-in-the-world. My practice explores the concept of flows through materials and objects, and their expressivity via growth or decline within, and also outside of, my direct interaction with them. These flows or “non-human expressivities”³ are present within the organic world; in landscape, weather, the movement of water and animal behaviour. They are also cultural; they are found within the interaction of societies - in concepts such as The State, borders, economies and currencies. These have become the “abstract entities we credit with Being, species of things awesome with life-force of their own”.⁴

The writing of this thesis has driven the work. By exploring these ideas through writing, I have aimed to triangulate a space between these texts. Here, I am establishing a metaphorical site for my practice to reside. To explore the ideas of active materials and ideological flows I will look to the writing of anthropologist

2.
David Foster Wallace, “Forever Overhead,” in *Fictional International*, Vol. 19, No. 2, (Spring 1991), 32.

3.
Manuel DeLanda, “The Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze”. (Paper presented at The European Graduate School, Saas-Fee, Switzerland, June 30, 2007).

4.
Michael Taussig, *The Magic of the State*. (London: Routledge, 1997), 3.

Tim Ingold. I will use these ideas to traverse and define the ways I approach materiality and the place of process within my practice. To investigate the way colour operates within my practice I will look to Michael Taussig and his anthropological account of the many histories of colour as laid out in his book *What Color Is the Sacred?* (2009)

By using research as a method of triangulating a space for art, I am also using the strategy of reading ‘around’ or circumnavigating other artwork. I will be looking at the writing, which accompanied two exhibitions. The first, *The End of Money* at Witte de With, Rotterdam in 2011 and the second, Michael Stevenson’s *Answers to Some Questions About Bananas* at the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco in 2006. Both shows included multiple texts, written around ideas of government, currency, economics and how the art world is contained within these ideas and also propositions for how art “might be experienced outside the value systems set by economic interests”.⁵

My practice responds to my research of these experiences, by constituting another experience within the installations I make. I will produce something affective, a remnant or residue or a translation of the larger into smaller: of being alive. The research will interweave with the materials I have chosen; salt and seawater, whitewash, coins, fabrics and copper sulphate to create a project

which gestures towards the informational – the texture of information – and its multiples ambiances.

5.
Gaitan, Juan A. Introduction to *The End of Money*. (Witte de With: Rotterdam, 2010): 6.

*There are human becomings, animal becomings, plant becomings, and so on. As they move together through time and encounter one another, these paths interweave to form an immense and continually evolving tapestry. Anthropology, then, is the study of human becomings as they unfold within the weave of the world.*⁶

In his lecture “Towards an ecology of materials” at The UCD School of Archaeology, Dublin, Tim Ingold begins his plea for a inclusive understanding of our relationship to and interaction with matter and what it can create with an argument against the Aristotelian philosophical concept ofhylomorphism. He references Aristotle’s description of object creation as something that “begins with a form in mind and a formless lump of raw material and ends when form and matter are united in a complete artefact”.⁷ This understanding privileges humans as exceptional, and within it matter becomes simply an inert substance that has form imposed on it to create a finished object. Ingold argues that matter, far from being inert, is full of material flows, movement and potentiality. Materials for Ingold are in a continual state of becoming.

Ingold believes materials are in a constant process of growth or “ontogenesis”.⁸ These ideas are a continuation of Gilbert

6.
Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essay on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 9.

7.
Tim Ingold. “Towards an Ecology of Materials” (Paper presented at UCD School of Archaeology, Dublin, Ireland, February 7, 2012).

8.
Ingold, “Towards an Ecology of Materials.”

Simondon’s theories, as laid out in his thesis *L’Individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d’information* (*Individuation in the light of notions of form and information*) (1964). Here, he uses the example of the production of a brick by hand. While the pressing of clay (formless raw material) into a mould (form) may seem as if it supports the hylomorphic description of object creation, Simondon breaks this process down further, describing both the construction of the wooden brick mould and the digging up, sieving and softening of the clay as two “transformative half chains”.⁹ These two half chains then meet as the “expressive force of the makers gesture com(es) up against the compressive resistance of the hard wood of the moulds wall”.¹⁰ The energies and forces of the materials come together to create an equilibrium from which the brick emerges.

However, Ingold would not refer to this brick as an “object”¹¹ but rather a “thing”.¹² He purports that there is a radical difference between *objects* and *things*. His definitions of these terms are based on the Martin Heidegger text *What Is a Thing?* (1967). Ingold takes Heidegger’s *object* to be something that is “complete and ready made”;¹³ however, his *thing* is taken as not an *object*

9.
Ingold, “Towards an Ecology of Materials.”

10.
ibid.

11.
ibid.

12.
ibid

13.
ibid.



Fig. 1

but a “gathering of movement”.¹⁴ Attempts to engage with *objects* are possible only as an interaction between surfaces. The *object* closes in upon itself; we cannot “correspond”¹⁵ with it. Alternatively, to interact with a *thing* is to “join in the processes of its ongoing formation...to bring the movements of our own being into close correspondence with those of its constituent materials”.¹⁶ Heidegger refers to this participatory interaction as “thinging”.¹⁷ Our ability to follow the material flows of *things* through the participation in *thinging* produces a different affective response.

Ingold’s understanding of materials and the *things* they constitute as being in a constant state of flux privileges production over consumption. *Objects* become *objects* by the process of their creation being finished, which means any changes in the *object* post finishing are defined as wear due to consumption. *Things* are never finished. They are always imbued with the “potential for further making”¹⁸ and continued growth. This focus on the energy that materials emit and the continued ‘making’ beyond my own ‘making’ is why the term *thing* and Ingold’s definition of the ecology of materials seem very pertinent to my practice, and the way

14.
Ingold, “Towards an Ecology of Materials.”

15.
ibid.

16.
ibid.

17.
ibid.

18.
ibid.

I participate with my materials to create *things*, which in turn continue to grow along the “manifold lines of becoming”.¹⁹

An example of my participation with materials, and their inherent energies, is a video work, made this year, titled *The Texture of Information*. The video looks down onto a shiny, wet concrete floor. The floor has just been painted with a layer of whitewash. Over the 2-hour duration of the video the wet floor dries leaving a chalky white residue. The video exists as one part of an installation, projected large against one wall. My intention is not for it to be viewed as a film but rather as part of the environment of the room. If watched in real time the changes are so gradual that they are hardly noticeable and initially it could be read as a still image. Instead, the suggestions of movement sneak up on the viewer, the whitening begins at the edges and then fades inwards in patches, the image changes in slight increments each time the viewer’s attention returns to it. The video slowly traces the “gathering of movement”²⁰ that is inherent within Ingold’s *things*.

The video stemmed from my use of whitewash, which I use to paint floors within some installations. Whitewash is made by mixing hydrated lime with salt and water creating a slightly milky solution that over the course of a few hours dries to a matte white. In my installations, it works as a textured crust describing parts



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

19.
Ingold, *Being Alive*, 10.

20.
Ingold, “Towards an Ecology of Materials.”



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

of the floor. You can feel a slight crunch underfoot when walking on it and the matte finish acts to absorb light. The whitewash is a way to articulate or map a part of the room. The brush strokes reach in arcs describing the trajectory of the arm that has painted them, which draws associations with painting and mapping. Within the video I wanted to speak to the participation of *things*, which lead to the, semi magical, appearance of the white crust. Unlike the surface-to-surface interaction Ingold describes when referencing participation with *objects*, the whitewash literally enters the surface which is the concrete floor. The revealed whiteness is an effect of the concrete drawing in the wetness leaving only the chalky, salty residue. I chose to project the video to focus on the absorption into the surface. The projection seems to fluctuate between being a floor and being a wall, between sitting on the wall and appearing to be leaking out from within it. So, while the dry whitewashed surfaces of my installations map the rooms I use, the video maps the achingly slow alchemical slide from invisible to tangible.

*The forms of things, far from having been imposed from without upon an inert substrate, arise, and are borne along – as indeed we are too – within this current of materials. As with the earth itself, the surface of every solid is a crust, the more or less ephemeral congregate of a generative movement.*²¹

21.
Ingold, *Being Alive*, 24.

While the imposition of form or idea are not integral in the formation of *things*, the human tendency to apply a conceptual layer to *things*, value for example, can reduce its *thingness*, and therefore our ability to use its literal matter for the means of defining or recognizing it. The most literal example of this is money or currency. In his essay “*Where’s the Money, Lebowsky? Making Ends Meet* (2011), Dieter Roelstraete defers to Niall Ferguson’s definition of the concept of money as “a medium of exchange that can be used for the purchase of goods and services”.²² But there is also a physical thing to which this conceptual medium of exchange is applied. So, there is money the *idea* but also money the *thing* and the relationship between this idea of value applied and the value inherent in the *thing’s* materials. Currency is the application of value to a “disk made of metal alloy,”²³ a piece of paper or in Australia’s case, (along with Bermuda, Brunei, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Romania and Vietnam), a piece of polymer biaxially-oriented polypropylene (BOPP). But through this application the material worth begins to disappear. Witte de With curator Juan A. Gaitán, in his essay *Folding Money* (2011), equates banknotes with paintings as “things in which the support (paper canvas) is effectively cancelled out by the image and what it represents, which is value. In order to become denominators of value, banknotes (and paintings) must renounce their materiality”.²⁴



Fig. 7

Of course this application of value to matter for the purpose of trade does not always come in the form of coins and notes. On the Micronesian islands of Yap, the original currency is Rai is made from large calcite stones, carved into a donut shape. Some so large they are almost immovable. These will usually be traded and change hands without actually being moved. With the use of these stones as currency the conceptual value and the material value are much more closely linked. The stone’s value is based on its size and quality and also its history; the difficulty of its retrieval and its age. Although Rai are still used ceremonially the difficulties inherent in having money of this size has led the island to using the United States dollar as their currency.

22.
op cit Niall Ferguson in Dieter Roelstraete. “ ‘Where’s the Money, Lebowsky?’ Making

Ends Meet.” In *The End of Money*, (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2011), 16.

23.
Juan A. Gaitán, “Folding Money.” *Fillip* Issue No.15 (Fall, 2011), 39.

24.
Gaitán, “Folding Money.” 34.



Fig. 8

A coin is slightly different, however. Its material worth is harder to cover over. This *thing*, this “disc made of metal alloy”²⁵ when “detached from its denomination”²⁶ is a *thing* that is worth either more or less than its applied denomination. This material value is “constantly threatening to supersede the denomination of the coins and make its monetary value irrelevant.”²⁷ Websites such as Coinflation²⁸ are set up for the tracking of metal prices and comparing it alongside a coin’s denomination. Walter Benjamin described coins as “the first artworks that could be massively and pre-industrially reproduced”.²⁹ Grau uses the example of engravers such as Eukleidas, Kimon or Evainetos working in fifth century Syracuse. These men would, after designing and etching the coins, sign them. However coins do not operate this way today. As the smallest denomination in economies dealing with larger and larger amounts of money “you can no longer consider the singular coin as an artwork”.³⁰ Coins used to balance “between materiality and symbolism”³¹ but as currency becomes less and less material the

25.

Gaitán, “Folding Money.” 39.

26.

ibid.

27.

Juan A. Gaitán, Introduction to *The End of Money*. (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2011), 7.

28.

“Coinflation: Measuring the Metal Value of Coins,” accessed June 1, 2012, <http://www.coinflation.com>.

29.

op cit Walter Benjamin in D.Grau, “The End of Coins, The Triumph of Money and the Disruptive Revolution of Art.” in *The End of Money*, (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2011), 46.

30.

Donatien Grau, “The End of Coins: The Triumph of Money and the Disruptive Revolution of Art.” In *The End of Money*. (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2011), 47.

31.

Grau, “The End of Coins,” 49.

coins are disappearing. They are set to become “relic(s) from an object related past”,³² and there they will take on a third value, the value applied to a collectible.

The disappearance of money from the affective realm, particular the sensorial (touch, smell), is due in part to the distancing of finance from the simple conception referred to above, of money as “a medium of exchange”.³³ The current financial world is filled with “such hallucinatory constructs as structured investment vehicles, debt-for-equity or credit default swaps...and most plastically, toxic assets.”³⁴ We experience the complexity of the financial flows and mechanisms that form our economies on a more personal level, through the increasing use of credit cards over actual money. Here, I am not referring only to literal cash, but also to money we have in our savings accounts, used ‘electronically’ via online transactions and debit cards. Credit cards, says Roelstraete, are the “paradigmatic expression of a culture that has reconciled itself with the complete virtualisation of money”.³⁵ It is money we spend, that does not exist and was never ours, and yet we believe in its reality. Roelstraete goes on to say that the root word for

32.
Grau, “The End of Coins,” 48.

33.
op cit Niall Fergusson in Dieter Roelstraete. “‘Where’s the Money, Lebowski?’ Making Ends Meet.” in *The End of Money*, (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2011), 16.

34.
Dieter Roelstraete, “‘Where’s the Money, Lebowski?’ Making Ends Meet.” in *The End of Money*. (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2011), 15-16.

35.
Roelstraete, “‘Where’s the Money, Lebowski?’” 19.

credit is from the Latin verb believing, “credere; credit literally means ‘he believes’”.³⁶

This disappearance of tangible money has happened alongside the decline of money’s position as stable representation of value. This breakdown has led to a nostalgia for the tangible. People invest in real-estate, art, jewellery antiques, gold, anything they feel will weather the fluctuations and flows of the financial world with slightly more stability than currency. People want to be able to touch and smell these things of value; to feel a more established “stricter link between (their) wealth and (their) matter”.³⁷

In my work, I use currency to represent these shifting ideas of matter. The “desire and nostalgia for matter”³⁸ that leads people to invest in tangible things, further states the separation of money’s value from its *thingness*, or would it not also be considered a tangible thing in which to invest. So when a coin – a medium for storing value with which to trade, loses its status as a good container for value, the obscuring layer of value, the money, disappears, leaving the “disc made of metal alloy”.³⁹ The disc alone can more clearly show its *thingness*, its continued becoming as matter outside both our interactions with it and outside of the concepts and ideas (values) we have applied to it.

36.
Roelstraete, “‘Where’s the Money, Lebowski?’” 19.

37.
Juan A. Gaitán, “Folding Money.” in *Fillip* Issue No. 15 (Fall, 2011), 33.

38.
Gaitán, “Folding Money.” 33.

39.
Gaitán, “Folding Money.” 39.

I alter the coins I use by soaking them in copper sulphate or salt water. These liquids behave in the same fashion when brought into contact with metals. They rust and corrode aluminium, and oxidize metals like copper, bronze and brass, creating a patina called verdigris. So the coins, which have an aluminium outer, turn a bright rust orange and bubble as they partially dissolve, while those that have a copper outer develop a blue green coating. The chemical reaction reveals not only a “disc of metal alloy”⁴⁰ but an alloy disc with an identifiable metal as its outer. As the metal reacts it reveals itself to be a thing in flux. I have also altered coins through the application of whitewash. Both actions effectively obscure the details embossed into the coin. Its denomination, its country of origin and its decorative elements are either worn away or covered over. Yet, however obscured the embossed coin face, or however strongly the metals reaction acts to reassert its thingness over its conceptual value, to me the coins, or even a blank metal disk will still read as a coin. It is an iconic symbol of value. Coins embody the tensions present when a *thing* that has symbolised value falls into obsolescence.

The matter of money, and its material flows, and the conceptual value of money, and its use in trade, combine with other global flows (weather, tides, migration, conflict) to make up the ever changing “abstract entities”⁴¹ we call the economy and the state.

40.
Gaitán, “Folding Money.” 39.
41.
Taussig, *Magic of the State*, 3.



Fig. 9

*The way the primeval forests and swamps went under to become coal and petroleum, the way the coal gas came to illuminate nineteenth-century cities and excrete waste product from which first colours and then just about everything else could be made in one mighty imitation of nature. We cannot see that as sacred or enchanting because we have displaced the language of alchemy by that of the chemists. We do not mistake color for calor.*⁴²

In his book, *What Color Is the Sacred?* (2009) Michael Taussig references the conflation of colour and heat by the seventh century scholar Isidore of Seville. This association stemmed not only from the similarity of the Spanish words for colour and heat, ‘color’ and ‘calor’, but also from his belief that colours originated with fire and sunlight. Colour here is something part magical, part natural and this way of thinking about colour was carried through from when the dyeing of fabrics was first applied to the ‘dyeing’ of metals; colour being the property altered in the alchemical undertaking of turning ordinary metals gold.

Colour often exists in our mind as connected to nature. We think of, for example, the blues of the ocean, the reds of the desert, the white of snow. Yet, as city dwellers, our experience of colour is largely mediated by industry. We see this in plastics produced in brilliant hues, as well as sunsets altered by pollution. The mid nineteenth century saw the organic chemical industry begin to mass-produce colour outside of the previously available colours created using natural dyes such as cochineal and indigo. This

42.
Michael Taussig, *What Color Is the Sacred?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,

signalled a turning point that has led us to the staggering choice of multicoloured products that make up the current world of global trade; it was these “dazzling standardized colours that gave the final spit and polish to what Karl Marx saw as the spirit-like character of the commodity.”⁴³ Colour now, is not the conflation with heat, or with nature, but rather a conflation with a new “second nature”;⁴⁴ the alchemy of chemistry.

Late capitalism, of course, is dependent of the generation of affect. Juan A. Gaitán describes economies as “fuelled by affect and desire.”⁴⁵ One of the ways affect is mediated and produced within our capitalist economies is through colour. Colour has the ability to work as a unifying continuum between humans and non-humans (and *things*), through each colours signs and associations, and also through the colour as something bodily. Something felt rather than addressed. Taussig described colour as one of the “forms of sensatness, of bodily knowing, that exist below the radar of consciousness and are all the more powerful for so being.”⁴⁶

Colour and trade have long been interwoven entities. Within the slave trade, colour operated as coin; as currency. Europeans used cloths dyed in India to trade with African kings and chiefs in

43.
Taussig, *What Color Is the Sacred?*, 5.

44.
Taussig, *What Color Is the Sacred?*, 6.

45.
Gaitán, “Folding Money.” 32.

46.
Taussig, *What Color Is the Sacred?*, 15.

exchange for slaves. Also traded were cowry shells, which were at the time a West African form of currency, brandy, guns and gunpowder. Yet the cloths, sometimes dyed in a single colour, sometimes striped, checked or with floral designs, took “pride of place”⁴⁷ for trade. Prior to this, colour was traded in the form of dyes. Within the spice trade between Europe and the Orient, dyes were one of the most traded items. In thinking of colour as a dye or a spice to be traded, then, it becomes a substance; tangible, yet still magical.

*Look! Look at Color! Become Aware!*⁴⁸

Within my practice I have been using fabrics, mostly muslin and bleached cotton or linen. I think of these as operating like an envelope or container. Some cloths are soaked in seawater, while others are soaked in the blue solution made from copper sulphate. The blue, like Taussig’s “second nature,”⁴⁹ imitates the blue we associate with the glittering water of tropical beach paradise. Such a colour could only hope to be recreated in a dye through chemistry. My attempt to contain the blue of that tropical water within the fabric begins with the brilliant blue of the copper sulphate crystals. However, as the fabric absorbs the solution, it takes on a blue-grey tone and finally, as the cloth dries, it becomes the green

47.
Taussig, *What Color Is the Sacred?*, 135.

48.
Taussig, *What Color Is the Sacred?*, 243.

49.
Taussig, *What Color is the Sacred*, 6.



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

of the verdigris, the patina on the coins. Soaking the cloth in seawater is a literal attempt to contain the ocean, or its dried up remnants. The results are hardly visible. The iconic blue of the ocean does not transfer to the cloth. Instead, only a slight salt crust, and the resulting stiffness, remains when the cloth dries. When we are describing seeing the ocean, more often than not we will prefix the words sea, ocean or water, with colour; blue, grey, green. The copper sulphate affected cloths attempt to embody this association we have with the sea through a chemical imitation of its colour.

The cloth dyed in an attempt to embody the sea can be interrupted by the reintroduction of seawater. When wet, the cloth can no longer contain the colour, instead it begins to leak out. The colour of the fabric transforms again. The original brilliant blue of the copper sulphate dye separates from the cloth, leaking out and pooling on the floor. The areas of cloth from which the blue has escaped are left with only an acrid yellow. The acidity of the remaining colour speaks to the constructed, chemical nature of the dye.

Like the traded cloth Taussig described, some of my fabrics have been stained with stripes. The fabric is first folded, and then folded again, and so on until its surface is a square of around 30cm by 30cm. I then paint stripes into the surface layer with copper sulphate. The copper sulphate seeps through the surface layer to affect some of the layers below. When unfolded, the stain is worked across the cloth in different densities. In some areas the



Fig. 12

stripes are thick and strong, seeping toward each other in an attempt to connect. Other areas remain completely blank, untouched by the solution. The folding of the cloth has affected the flow of information through its centre gesturing softly to the fluctuating layers of information present in all things.

Is there any nature left? you ask. Is its disappearance what makes it so tempting? For the sea has long disappeared from people's lives. Now it's come back, as a spectacle, something visually beyond the body, like a painting on a gallery wall. As a workspace the sea was beautiful but dangerous. It combined varieties of pleasure with varieties of pain such that both pleasure and pain were often cancelled out in place of an almost religious power, which both Conrad and Melville built their works around. Until fairly recently the sea was everywhere and a large fraction of humanity employed by it.⁵⁰

The ocean and its planetary currents became a site of trade as people learnt to interpret its swells. The seventeenth century saw the creation of “new transatlantic economy”⁵¹ between Europe and the Americas. The creation of these trade routes was “essential to the rise of capitalism and the modern, global economy.”⁵² Today, global trade continues to be heavily dependent on ships, with enormous container ships traversing the oceans carrying millions of products daily. But these ships can be run by crews as small as twenty people and many ports have since been gentrified with the land prized for its ocean frontage. The major economic industry at sea is now the exploitation of natural resources, via fishing, and drilling for oil or natural gas.

50.
Taussig, *What Color Is the Sacred?*, 142.

51.
Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 2.

52.
Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many Headed Hydra*, 6-7.



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18

*A rising tide lifts all boats.*⁵³

The complex interweaving of flows between water (oceans, rivers) and the economy are visible in their most basic form in our economic lexicon. Fluid aphorism and metaphor are present throughout discussion of our financial systems. *Liquidity* or *liquid assets* tell us a company is *solvent*. Money *flows* through revenue *streams*. Shares are *float*ed and some remain *buoyant* and companies imply their profits humanitarian reach by alluding to *trickle down* economies. Or in even more colloquial terms “When you need money, you can *tap* a friend, *sponge* off relatives, *dip* into savings or—if you’re prepared to be unscrupulous—*skim* a little something off the top.”⁵⁴ These metaphors found a physical form when, in 1949, New Zealand economist Alban W. Bill Phillips built a hydro mechanical computer that used water to represent money flowing through a series of tubes and tanks. The machine was built as a way of predicting the effect different government actions would have on the national economy using the Keynesian economic model. Phillips developed his machine as water powered so that movements or flows that produced the changing in the economy could be clearly viewed, making the machine an ideal teaching tool. American economist Abba P. Lerner named the

53.

An aphorism attributed to John F. Kennedy, although his speechwriter Ted Sorensen claimed it was borrowed from the slogan of The New England Council. The phrase is used to describe the macroeconomic idea that a focus on improving the general economy will lead to participants in smaller areas of the economy to benefit also.

54.

James Geary, “How Metaphors Shape our View of the Economy,” *All Aphorisms, All the Time*, August 8, 2012, <http://www.jamesgeary.com/blog/how-metaphors-shape-our-view-of-the-economy/>

machine the Moniac. Lerner was “credited with popularizing Keynes’s ideas in America”.⁵⁵ He introduced a slightly adapted version of the Moniac to America, produced to the suit US economy. It is thought that only 15 machines were ever produced, and while three remain in England, one at the University of Leeds, one at Cambridge University and one at the London Science Museum, the London School of Economics donated theirs to Phillips’ home country New Zealand where it went to the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research in Wellington. Others were sent to Amsterdam, Istanbul, Boston, Chicago, Guatemala City and even one to Melbourne, which currently resides in a small foyer between two sets of sliding doors as you enter the Giblin Eunson Library at The University of Melbourne in Parkville. Yet while Phillips built it for educational purposes and Lerner adopted it to further his ideological agenda in his home country it was the “undeniable sculptural presence”⁵⁶ that initially attracted New Zealand artist Michael Stevenson.

55.

Michael Stevenson, “The Search for the Fountain of Prosperity,” *DOT DOT DOT 13*, ed. Stuart Bailey (The Hague: Dot dot dot, Winter 2006/07), 86.

56.

ibid



Fig. 19

What is most striking about the machine is that it gives 'the national economy' – that invisible yet omnipresent being – a physical body. The hitherto unseeable multitude of social processes and restless circulatory activity that we call the economy and recognize only via its abstractions, can, with this model, be viewed in its entirety, in the round.⁵⁷

Only two of the Phillips machines are still operational, the first at Cambridge University and the second at the New Zealand Institute for Economic Research in Wellington. This is where Stevenson first encountered the machine. He describes the effect of the water rushing through the pipes labelled things like Total Income and siphoning off into tanks labelled Taxation or 'Consumption Expenditure' as bringing to life "something beyond the functional."⁵⁸ As if layered below the physical representation of economic theory there was "a fountain from whence, it can be said, a plentiful flow of magical, biological, and alchemical allegories spring forth."⁵⁹ After this initial enchantment, Stevenson researched the machine further and it was the mention of the Moniac that Lerner sold to The Central Bank of Guatemala that drew him into the project, which culminated in the installation *Answers to Some Questions about Bananas* (2006) at the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco. It is through this exhibition and Stevenson's accompanying essay, *The Search for the Fountain of Prosperity* (2006) that I hope to articulate problematic elements that

⁵⁷

Stevenson, "Search for the Fountain of Prosperity," 85.

⁵⁸.

ibid.

⁵⁹.

ibid.



Fig. 20

arise in applying Ingold's ontology of interweaving flows and active materials. Ingold's flows could be read as divorced from any context outside that of the base participation of matter with matter. All these *things* interweave with no speculated implications. For example, the United Fruit Company's control of Central America was born out of a calculated control of multiple flows – the flows of power and politics, migration, communication and land and its material output.

A series of fountains were arranged to welcome the visitor, but it had been some time since the water has actually flowed in them. I had to take care, as I attempted to cross the dry plaza, not to walk into the empty, tile-lined pools that ringed the complex. It seemed that, metaphorically at least, the bank had lost its power over the forces of circulations.⁶⁰

For this project Stevenson went in search of Guatemala's Moniac. His essay, *In Search of the Fountain of Prosperity* (2006), describes visiting the Central Bank in Guatemala City where he is told that the Moniac was passed on to the University, the campus of which has since been relocated. The machine is lost, but during his search Stevenson explores the economic climate the country was in when the Moniac arrived and the ways in which this affected how the machine was received. 1953, the year of the Moniac's arrival in Guatemala, was the climax of what is now referred to as The Ten Years of Spring, a period of democracy in Guatemala which begun when the October Revolutionaries overthrew General Jorge Ubico in 1944. In 1953 however, the liberal government was under threat. The president, Jacobo Arbenz, elected in 1951, attempted to enact land reform, with the aim to "break up a number of large land holdings and distribute them to landless farmers."⁶¹ He described this redistribution as a way to pull

60.

Stevenson, "Search for the Fountain of Prosperity," 88.

61.

Peter Chapman, *Jungle Capitalists: A Story of Globalisation, Greed and Revolution* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2008), 124.

Guatemala out of “feudalism”⁶² and turn it into a modern capitalist state. The largest landholder at the time was American multinational The United Fruit Company, whose involvement in multiple facets of business in countries throughout Central and South America and the Caribbean had led them to be nicknamed ‘El Pulpo’, The Octopus.

What eventually became United Fruit began in the 1870s when two brothers Henry and Minor Keith were contracted to build a railway from the Costa Rican capital through swampland to the Atlantic Ocean. As they began building the railway they planted bananas to sell to the workers. Henry Keith, like many of the workers died from disease and the project went broke in the market crash of 1873. Minor, however, convinced the Costa Rican government that for the railway to be completed he would not only need more money but also large chunks of land, that he would develop as banana plantations, thus guaranteeing the railway the freight that would assure its survival. The United Fruit Company continued on from this model and as they extended their plantations into the countries that would come to be known as the ‘banana republics’. They also extended their control of the railways, ports, telephone and telegraph companies and the postal services. By 1929 they owned 12,000 square kilometers of land across Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Belize, Jamaica, Cuba, Columbia and Ecuador. Much of

62.
Peter Chapman, *Jungle Capitalists*. 124.

the land they owned sat unused, acquired only to stop competitors from farming it. This was the case of much of the land that the Arbenz government was trying to nationalise. Despite this United Fruit fought back, orchestrating a military coup that would end the democracy that had been fostered during The Ten Year Spring and bring 40 years of military rule and civil war.

United Fruit harnessed multiple streams to overthrow the Arbenz government. They enlisted the help of the CIA and “the father of public relations”⁶³ Edward Bernays to paint Arbenz as a communist within America. Actors were hired to create a radio program called Voice of Liberation to be played within Guatemala to spread anti government propaganda and imply that there was a civil war brewing. In rural areas they dropped letters from planes containing a message from the Guatemalan archbishop decrying Arbenz as an atheist. Within the US, Bernays created The Middle American News Agency, a fake news outlet that spread propaganda describing Moscow’s set up a base in Guatemala from which to invade America. They manipulated the public by encouraging fear and then harnessing the flows of power it created. The Somoza family, who ruled neighbouring Nicaragua were sympathetic to their cause and allowed the military to prepare there. The US government and CIA supported coup placed Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas in power, who, having been hand picked by United Fruit, was much more amenable to their cause.

63.
“Edward Bernays, ‘Father of Public Relations’ And Leader in Opinion Making, Dies at 103,” *New York Times*, March 10, 1995, accessed September 15, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/08/16/specials/bernays-obit.html>.

United Fruit controlled literal flows in, out and across Guatemala through their monopoly over the train system and control of the ports. They controlled the flows of communication, as they owned the telephone, telegraph and mail systems. Through the control of these elements and their large land holdings they completely dominated the flows of power and economy as they had forced themselves into a position in which the countries whole economic stability relied upon them. At times they would even take control of flows of water. They would use their position to control water supplies – driving away competition by making it impossible for them to irrigate their crops. Large multinationals can become abstracted constructs like ‘the state’, and in United Fruit’s case they operated above the state in the power structure.

If we viewed Guatemala through Ingold’s ideas I could perhaps describe these actions or flows as “unfold(ing) within the weave of the world”.⁶⁴ With conceptual flows; commerce and trade being effected by or interweaving with natural flows; the migration of workers and crops based on flows of weather or disease. While I do find Ingold’s positivist ontology a useful and beautiful approach within my own participation with matter and things I think it lacks the ability to account for these other histories (sometimes violent) that inflect places and *things* and in turn mediate our experiences of being-in-the-world.

64.
Tim Ingold, *Being Alive*. 9.

*My working replica Moniac was left unattended for the duration of the exhibition reducing it to a decrepit, ruinous, economic state.*⁶⁵

Stevenson’s Moniac facsimile in its “ruinous”⁶⁶ state embodies the financial implications of the United Fruits orchestrated coup of Arbenz. The decrepit machine represents the loss of Guatemala’s independence and also the loss of control over their “search for national prosperity.”⁶⁷ With the Moniac at its centre, the installation is contextualised with a screen showing a United Fruits promotional video, some empty banana boxes stacked in a corner and of course the accompanying publication c/o The Central Bank of Guatemala. These gesture towards the point in Guatemala in which the ‘the state’, that thing “awesome with life force of (its) own”⁶⁸ was over taken by a second abstraction ‘the company’. Stevenson’s Moniac could be viewed through Ingold’s lens as either an *object*, finished with the wear over time thought of as consumption, or as a *thing*; unfinished with the materials allowed to continue on in their own production (becoming). However, this work is less an interaction or participation between artist and matter, than between artist and the histories this matter embodies.

65.
Michael Stevenson, “Answers to Some Questions About Bananas,” *Michael Stevenson*, accessed September 10, 2012, http://www.michaelstevenson.info/projects/answers_to_some_questions_about_bananas/.

66.
ibid.

67.
ibid.

68.
Taussig, *The Magic of the State*, 3.



Fig. 21



Fig. 22

At some level we know and even take for granted that salt was in demand as a preservative of both meat and fish throughout the Atlantic World. Indeed, it was a precious commodity. Until the twentieth century, when modern geology revealed that nearly all places on this planet have salt, trade routes were established to transport it, governments taxed it, alliances and empires were built upon it, revolutions were precipitated over it, social classes were partly distinguished by it, and people were enslaved to secure it.⁶⁹

The banana, like salt and the “disc of metal alloy”⁷⁰ is loaded with conceptual value. It represents all the intertwining power flows that went into its production and distribution. So the banana’s value encompassed the value of United Fruit’s monopoly over infrastructure and the power they wielded through pliable dictators and the use of violent suppression. The banana’s intrinsic value was created through marketing campaigns in America. It was first marketed as an exotic, luxury food then – as the market became more saturated, and the price lowered – a new strategy evolved, presenting bananas as an essential health food.

Over the years, many food commodities have been highly valued within trade. From the seventh to the eleventh centuries, salt was traded weight for weight with gold. In the slave trade in the Americas between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries salt operated cyclically. Crystallised seawater was harvested, and

⁶⁹.

Cynthia M. Kennedy, “The Other White Gold: Salt, Slaves, The Turks and Caicos Islands, and British Colonialism.”, *The Historian*. Vol. 69, No.2 (2007): 218

⁷⁰.

Gaitán, “Folding Money.” 39.

boats filled with salt sailed from the West Indies to North America. Here, it was, ironically, used to make salted cod, which was then shipped back to the Caribbean to feed slaves working on the sugar plantations.

Salt is intertwined within the elements of my work that I have referenced thus far. It is an ingredient of whitewash, it can be used to oxidize coins or stiffen cloths. Salt has the ability to preserve, dry out, cleanse, protect, etch into, dissolve and crystallise again all of which imbue salt with its *thingness* or as Ingold described it the “potential for further making.”⁷¹ The work *Explaining Roads* has had many iterations throughout the year. The work consists of a sheet of soft plastic matting with the corners folded and taped to create a loosely tray-like object. The tray is then filled with seawater. The soft edges are propped where needed. This need is dependent on the characteristics of the floor on which the mat is installed. The water settles into the tray in a description of that particular floor’s slants and dips. The work exists whilst wet but also in all its states of drying and the outcomes are unprescribed and durational. Each time a new trace is left and a different spontaneous geography created. Beyond drying any movement of the tray loosens and cracks the image at which point simply reintroducing water brings the cycle back around to begin mapping anew.

The histories of salt are many and varied and it has a plethora

71.
Ingold, “Towards an Ecology of Materials.”



Fig. 23

of cultural associations that persist through commonplace colloquialisms and superstitions: ‘salt of the earth’, ‘worth their salt’, ‘salting the earth’ and the common superstitious gesture is throwing salt over your left shoulder, which is supposed to ward off the devil. But for me, the ocean is salt’s strongest association. Salt value is completely dependent on its availability. In Australia, salt surrounds us on all sides. In thinking about salt and the ocean in contemporary society another immediate association is (de)salination. Salt has become a byproduct, a cast off from the process of turning seawater into fresh water. Prompted by these associations, I use seawater collected from South Melbourne Beach in my work. Water is also always active in my work. It can contain, coral, be absorbed, leak, dye, soak, stain, wash and dry up. The

ocean and its water are present throughout my research, as a huge, abstract, unfathomable concept alive with interweaving flows and forces. It is a site of trade, and the birthplace of global capitalism. It is something to which value is applied via the application of treaties, borders, and claims over natural resources and fishing rights. So, by collecting water from the edge of the sea, and taking it inland to my studio, I hope to encourage a continuation of these flows and histories as they unfold within a different environment.



Fig. 24



Fig. 25

When I was a schoolboy I discovered that a house alone does not exist, that it does not end at the outer limits of the ground floor but continues onto the streets, the garden, then to the house across the street. The house across the street itself continues into what is in front of it, and so forth. To imagine one house is to imagine the whole world.⁷²

The research methodology of this thesis is also my primary method for my work. In the introduction to this paper, I referred to this method as ‘reading around’ or ‘circumnavigating’ the work; triangulating a space for my work to reside. My installations perform this. Elements hinge to the architecture; they articulate the environment they exist in, and the ways that this environment can bleed out and be bled into. The whitewash seeps into the concrete floor. Seawater in a plastic tray pools at the room’s lowest point. Hanging cloths filter light and flutter revealing airflows moving through the room. And sunlight through a slightly ajar window will describe a path across the room over time. By acknowledging the room, in particular its perimeters, I want to point outwards to the larger systems, flows and economies within which the room exists.

The research has led my practice through the layering of sources present in the thesis. This has fed back into the work in the form of a literal layering within the installations. Water fills a



Fig. 26

tray sitting on a coin that lies in whitewash that is seeping into the concrete floor. A video of the floor is layered onto the already textured surface of a wall. Multiple cloths of different opacities are layered in front of the window, filtering sunlight, which has already passed through a low, heavy winter sky.

72.

op cit Yona Friedman in F. Orso and U. Pitro. *Kriterien für zukunftsfähiges Stadtwohnen* Roland-Rainer-Forschungsstipendium 2008. (Vienna: Rahmen des Roland-Rainer-Forschungsstipendium, 2008) 59.

*When at home we are indoors, not in space, and when we go outdoors we are in the open, not in space. Casting our eyes upwards we see the sky, not space, and on a windy day we feel the air, not space. Space is nothing, and because it is nothing it cannot truly be inhabited at all.*⁷³

In a chapter entitled ‘Against Space’, Tim Ingold argues that the term ‘space’ cannot fully articulate the world and its infinite layering, interacting and participating. He instead describes us as “inhabit(ing) environments.”⁷⁴ I feel that here Ingold is gesturing towards the ideas I have expressed regarding Michael Stevenson’s work. Here, Ingold is saying that ‘space’ is far too abstract a concept. It is empty and “detached from the realities of life and experience.”⁷⁵ The term ‘environments’ has the ability to encompass, histories; both natural and cultural, and while it doesn’t explicitly account for these histories, it opens up his ontology to allow for them. This is where my installations sit. Unlike Michael Stevenson I do not explicitly reference these histories but rather draw in loose associations, hopefully allowing the environments to open out to encompass the layered and fluctuating histories that are present in all places and things. My research surrounds the work on all sides yet the points of contact are soft. The intention is not to approach this with specificity but rather letting my research flow into the work to create an ambience. The work is suggestive rather than representative as it attempts to communicate the texture of information.

⁷³
Ingold, *Being Alive*, 145.

⁷⁴.
ibid.

⁷⁵
ibid

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Fig. 1

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Fig. 2

Overell, Virginia. *The Texture of Information*, film still. 2012.

Fig. 3

Overell, Virginia. *The Texture of Information*, film still. 2012.

Fig. 4

Overell, Virginia. *The Texture of Information*, film still. 2012.

Fig. 5

Overell, Virginia. *The Texture of Information*, film still. 2012.

Fig. 6

Overell, Virginia. *The Texture of Information*, film still. 2012.

Fig. 7

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Fig. 12

Overell, Virginia. *Folded cloth*. 2012.

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Fig. 13
Overell, Virginia. *Scanned cloth - yellow*. 2012.

Fig. 14
Overell, Virginia. *Scanned cloth - striped*. 2012

Fig. 15
Overell, Virginia. *Seawater cloth - hanging*. 2012.

Fig. 16
Overell, Virginia. *Explaining roads - detail*. 2012.

Fig. 17
Overell, Virginia. *White wash with coin - detail*. 2012.

Fig. 18
Overell, Virginia. *Explaining roads, a town, a distant lake*. 2012.

Fig. 19
Overell Virginia. photo of *The Moniac* at The University of Melbourne, 2012.

Fig. 20
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Fig. 21
Overell, Virginia. *Salt work - detail*. 2012.

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Overell, Virginia. *Salt floor work - detail*. 2012.

Fig. 23
Overell, Virginia. *Explaining Roads*. 2012.

Fig. 24
Overell Virginia. *South Melbourne Beach*. 2012

Figure 25.
Overell, Virginia. *South Melbourne Beach water collecting*. 2012.

Fig. 26
Overell, Virginia. *A path described*. 2012.

